

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 ARA-16 ISO-00 EURE-00 SAJ-01 OMB-01 PM-07

NSC-07 SP-03 SS-20 RSC-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-10

NSAE-00 PA-04 USIA-15 PRS-01 NIC-01 EB-11 H-03 DRC-01

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P R 091620Z APR 74

FM AMEMBASSY PARIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8211

INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

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AMCONSUL BORDEAUX

AMCONSUL LYON

AMCONSUL MARSEILLE

AMCONSUL MARTINIQUE

AMCONSUL STRASBOURG

AMCONSUL NICE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 08695

CINCEUR FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, FR

SUBJECT: FRENCH PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS: MAJORITY

PROBLEMS INCREASE

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1. SUMMARY. WITH FORMAL ANNOUNCEMENTS OF CANDIDACY BY FINANCE MINISTER GISCARD D'ESTAING AND SOCIALIST LEADER FRANCOIS MITTERRAND, AND WITHDRAWAL OF EDGAR FAURE, HATS OF THREE PRINCIPAL PRESIDENTIAL CONTENDERS ARE NOW IN THE RING. PRIME MINISTER MESSMER'S STATEMENT APRIL 9 THAT HE WILL RUN IF THE OTHER MAJORITY CANDIDATES WITHDRAW HAS INFLUENCED FAURE, COULD POSSIBLY INFLUENCE GISCARD, BUT IS EXTREMELY UNLIKELY TO HAVE ANY EFFECT ON CHABAN-DELMAS' DECISION TO GO FOR THE BIG PRIZE. CANDIDATES NOW TOTAL SEVENTEEN, WITH OTHERS MAINLY OF FRINGE VARIETY. GISCARD'S CANDIDACY INCREASES DIFFICULT PROBLEMS FACED BY THE MAJORITY PARTIES, ALREADY IN SOME DISARRAY. CHABAN-DELMAS HAS MOVED QUICKLY AND DEFTLY TO GAIN GAULLIST PARTY (UDR) FORMAL ENDORSEMENT; AND SUPPORT OF LEADERSHIP OF MAJORITY CENTRISTS (CDP), THUS ASSURING HIM OF STARTING FROM BASE BROADER THAN UDR ALONE. MITTERRAND RUNNING AS COMMON SOCIALIST-COMMUNIST CANDIDATE SHOULD BE FORMIDABLE CAMPAIGNER AND FROM PRE-ELECTION STAGE, ELECTION LOOKS CLOSE. END SUMMARY.

2. GISCARD'S ANNOUNCEMENT OF HIS CANDIDACY WAS WELL TIMED POLITICALLY. HE DELIBERATELY WAITED UNTIL AFTER POMPIDOU'S FUNERAL AND MEMORIAL SERVICES BEFORE ANNOUNCING. KNOWN FOR HIS SKILLFUL USE OF TELEVISION, THE FINANCE MINISTER SHOULD WAGE A STRONG CAMPAIGN. FAURE'S WITHDRAWAL WILL STRENGTHEN HIS CHANCES. THE CURRENT ECONOMIC SITUATION, HOWEVER, SEEMS LIKELY TO WORK AGAINST HIM, AS WILL HIS ALOOF PATRICIAN IMAGE. HIS PARTY, THE INDEPENDENT REPUBLICANS (IR), REPRESENTS ONLY A SMALL CONSTITUENCY. GISCARD WILL HAVE AN UPHILL BATTLE IN ATTEMPTING TO GAIN ENOUGH GAULLIST AND CENTER SUPPORT TO OUTPOLL CHABAN-DELMAS ON THE FIRST ROUND.

3. WE HAD RECENT INDICATIONS THAT FAURE WAS PREPARING THE GROUNDWORK FOR A POSSIBLE WITHDRAWAL. AT AIRPORT LAST WEEKEND, MINISTER OF PUBLIC HEALTH PONIATOWSKI (IR) TOLD ME THAT IF GISCARD RAN, FAURE WOULD WITHDRAW. FAURE'S CABINET DIRECTOR MADE SOME POINT TO EMBOFF WHILE EXPRESSING DISAPPOINTMENT THAT HIS CANDIDACY HAD NOT MADE MORE IMPACT.
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4. CENTER REFORMIST LEADERS CONTINUE TO BIDE THEIR TIME. RADICAL PARTY LEADER SERVAN-SCHREIBER HAS INDICATED HE WILL MAKE NO DECISION BEFORE APRIL 12. HE

COULD DECIDE TO RUN HIMSELF. CENTER DEMOCRATIC PARTY LEADER JEAN LECANUET MAY COME OUT IN FAVOR OF GISCARD.

5. MITTERRAND, WHO FOLLOWED GISCARD'S TACTIC ON THE
TIMING OF HIS ANNOUNCEMENT, STARTS IN A GOOD POSITION TO
TAKE ADVANTAGE OF MAJORITY DIFFICULTIES CAUSED BY THEIR
MULTIPLICITY OF CANDIDATES. HE HAS BECOME THE SOLE CAN-
DIDATE OF THE LEFT WITHOUT HAVING TO SAY A WORD PUBLICLY.
THE LEFT GOES INTO THE CAMPAIGN UNITED, AND MITTERRAND
SHOULD BE A FORMIDABLE CAMPAIGNER. HOWEVER, NON-LEFT
CANDIDATES WILL NOW ATTACK HIM AS BEING A PRISONER OF
THE COMMUNIST PARTY AND THIS COULD COST HIM VOTES. TWO
IMPORTANT QUESTIONS -- WHICH THE CAMPAIGN WILL ANSWER --
ARE: WILL FRANCE'S ECONOMIC DIFFICULTIES WORK FOR OR
AGAINST MITTERRAND IN THE END; AND CAN HE SOMEHOW OVER-
COME THE RESIDUAL ANTI-COMMUNISM OF THE FRENCH ELECTORATE

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 PARIS 08695

WHICH UP TO NOW HAS LIMITED THE FRENCH LEFT VOTES TO 46-
47 PERCENT WHEN ALL ITS ELEMENTS ARE UNITED?

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6. FIRST OFF THE STARTING BLOCKS, CHABAN-DELMAS HAS HIS ELECTORAL MACHINE RUNNING AT SPEED AND HAS OBTAINED THE FORMAL ENDORSEMENT OF THE GAULLIST PARTY (UDR), AND THE SUPPORT OF CDP LEADERS DUHAMEL AND EDUCATION MINISTER FONTANET (CENTRIST PARTY WITHIN PRESENT MAJORITY). PRIME MINISTER MESSMER'S STATEMENT APRIL 9 THAT HE WILL RUN IF THE OTHER MAJORITY CANDIDATES WITHDRAW HAS INFLUENCED FAURE, COULD POSSIBLY INFLUENCE GISCARD, BUT IS EXTREMELY UNLIKELY TO HAVE ANY EFFECT ON CHABAN'S DECISION TO GO FOR THE BIG PRIZE. ALTHOUGH DUHAMEL'S PARLIAMENTARY GROUP IS SMALL (30 ASSEMBLY SEATS), THE CDP IS POLITICALLY ORIENTED CLOSE TO EDGAR FAURE AND HAS HISTORICAL LINKS WITH THE OPPOSITION CENTRISTS. DUHAMEL'S DECISION TO BACK CHABAN-DELMAS IS THUS SIGNIFICANT IN GIVING CHABAN A STARTING BASE BROADER THAN THE GAULLIST PARTY ALONE. CDP LEADERS WILL MEET APRIL 9 AND WILL PROBABLY FOLLOW RECOMMENDATION OF DUHAMEL AND FONTANET

AND DECLARE FORMALLY FOR CHABAN. CDP SUPPORT FOR CHABAN COULD BE PARTLY OFFSET, HOWEVER, BY CANDIDACY OF GAULLIST LOYALIST CHRISTIAN FOUCHET WHICH COULD CUT SOMEWHAT INTO CHABAN'S UDR CONSTITUENCY.

7. IT WILL BE DIFFICULT FOR THE MAJORITY CANDIDATES TO CAMPAIGN AGAINST MITTERRAND WITHOUT AT THE SAME TIME CAMPAIGNING AGAINST EACH OTHER. NET RESULT WILL ENABLE THE LEFT TO PORTRAY MITTERRAND AS A SERIOUS, STATESMAN-LIKE CANDIDATE HAVING BROAD SUPPORT, IN CONTRAST TO INTERNECINE BICKERING AMONG THE MAJORITY CANDIDATES.

8. ELECTION FROM PRE-CAMPAIGN STAGE LOOKS CLOSE. ACCORDING TO APRIL 8 BULLETIN QUOTIDIEN, A NON-PUBLISHED IFOP OPINION POLL GAVE ON FIRST ROUND 45 PERCENT TO

MITTERRAND, 32 TO CHABAN, 18 TO GISCARD AND 5 TO FAURE.
IN HYPOTHETICAL SECOND-ROUND RUNOFF, CHABAN NOSED OUT
MITTERRAND, 51 PERCENT TO 49. ANOTHER POLL, CONDUCTED
FOR NEWSPAPER L'AUREORE, TAKEN THREE DAYS BEFORE POMPI-
DOU'S DEATH AND RELEASED APRIL 6, HAS MITTERRAND EDGING

CHABAN 51 PERCENT TO 49. THESE POLLS, HOWEVER, ARE
BASED ON VERY SMALL PUBLIC OPINION SAMPLES AND SHOULD NOT
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BE GIVEN UNDUE WEIGHT AT THIS EARLY STAGE.
IRWIN

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